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Global cooperation key to boosting public health – UN Economic and Social Council



Many developing countries use traditional medicine to help meet some of their primary health care needs

9 July 2009 – A high-level United Nations Economic and Social Council ([ECOSOC](#)) gathering wrapped up today with a call for global cooperation to tackle public health challenges in the face of interrelated food, economic and climate crises which are stalling efforts to reach development targets.

In the Ministerial Declaration [adopted](#) by consensus in Geneva at the end of the four-day High Level Segment, participants stressed that “urgent and collective efforts” are crucial to improve public health, especially as the food crisis has affected the nutrition levels of people in poorer countries.

The financial and economic crises are “undermining and slowing or reversing the development gains of developing countries” as they try to meet the Millennium Development Goals ([MDGs](#)), eight anti-poverty targets with a 2015 deadline, the Declaration said.

Further, climate change poses serious health risks to all nations, especially to least developed, landlocked and small island developing countries, as well as those in Africa, it noted.

Cooperation, the Declaration said, is also vital “to meet emerging, new and unforeseen threats and epidemics,” including the A (H1N1) influenza virus and other potential pandemics.

In spite of some progress made in the past decade in boosting global health, ministers and delegates at the ECOSOC session lamented inequities both within and among countries.

“In particular, we are deeply concerned that maternal health remains one of the largest health inequities in the world,” they said, appealing on States to reaffirm their commitment to prevent and curb child and maternal mortality and morbidity.

Sha Zukang, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, today called the Declaration a comprehensive text, noting that a follow-up meeting will be held next year to gauge how much of an impact today's document has in changing public health systems.

At the opening of the High-Level Segment on Monday, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called on rich and poor nations to boost efforts to fight poverty and hunger, with a new [report](#) showing that overall progress has been too slow for most of the MDGs.

"This year's Millennium Development Goals Report delivers a message that should not surprise us but which we must take to heart: the current economic environment makes achieving the goals even more difficult," he [said](#).

The target for eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005 has already been missed, Mr. Ban noted. Meanwhile, 1.4 billion people must gain access to improved sanitation by 2015 to achieve the sanitation target.

"We have been moving too slowly to meet our goals," he said. "Yet the report also shows that when we have the right policies, backed by adequate funding and strong political commitment, actions can yield impressive results."

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